

January 7, 1999

Re: Call-in Technical Inquiry 0432 – Floodplain Determination

Dear Mr. Dones:

This letter is in response to your November 20, 1998 request for a floodplain determination for property within your region. You are considering sites for a proposed action in a large delineated area and would like to know where floodplains exist within the delineated area in advance of the decisionmaking process. You provided NEPA Call-In with the names of four streets which make up the general boundary of the delineated area and a map with a sketch of the delineated area.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

NEPA Call-In determined flood zones AO, AH, A4, and B are within the delineated area. Zones AO, AH, and A4 represent varying degrees of the 100-year floodplain and Zone B represents the 500-year floodplain. Our detailed findings are presented below.

DETAILED FINDINGS

NEPA Call-In provided the information you sent us to Flood Zone Determination Services (FZDS), (800) 841-0662, for a commercial floodplain determination of the delineated area. In the absence of specific parcel information such as an address or plat map with a legal property description, FZDS was able to interpolate general flood zone areas from the appropriate Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for the area in question onto two detailed electronic maps. The first map shows the delineated area in relation to Zone B, or areas of 500-year flooding (enclosed). The second map shows the delineated area in relation to Zone B and varying degrees of Zone A (Zones AO, AH, and A4), which represent the 100-year flood zone (enclosed). Also enclosed is a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) form 81-93, "Standard Flood Hazard Determination," denoting the highest degree of flood zone encountered in the delineated area, Zone AO.

Regarding the use of commercial floodplain determination services for agency decisionmaking, the NEPA Liaison, GSA National Office, cautions that such services should not be relied upon as a sole source of information. The NEPA Liaison has stated that commercial floodplain determination services could be used to support other information obtained by you in consultation with the USACE, local city and State planning and permitting offices, and other appropriate agencies such as FEMA and Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

You should also be aware that Federal agencies must comply with the provisions of Executive Order (EO) 11988, "Floodplain Management," May 24, 1977. EO 11988 requires Federal agencies to avoid "to the extent possible the long and short term adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains and to avoid direct or indirect support of floodplain development wherever there is a practicable alternative." The EO discusses development in relation to the 100-year floodplain (500-year floodplain for critical actions), but does not provide waivers for development in floodplains with minimal flood depth or areas protected from 100-year floods by levees or other structures. Such areas are not necessarily removed from the 100-year floodplain for the purposes of compliance with EO 11988. According to EO 11988, if your action is determined to be a critical action, it should not be located in property designated as Zone X with shading or Zone B unless this is the only practicable alternative (see NEPA Call-In Factsheet, "When Siting in the Floodplain is the only Practicable Alternative").

The materials in this TI have been prepared for use by GSA employees and contractors and are made available at this site only to permit the general public to learn more about NEPA. The information is not intended to constitute legal advice or substitute for obtaining legal advice from an attorney licensed in your state and may or may not reflect the most current legal developments. Readers should also be aware that this response is based upon laws, regulations, and policies in place at the time it was prepared and that this response will not be updated to reflect changes to those laws, regulations and policies.

Sincerely,

(Original Signed)

NEPA Call-In Researcher